

CHAPTER 43

Zukhruf: Gold

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 7 sections; 89 verses)

This is the fourth chapter of the *Ha Mîm* group, and is named *Gold* from the mention of *Zukhruf* in verse 35, where it is stated that not gold and silver and worldly embellishments but righteous deeds are acceptable to Allâh; in fact these are the things which keep men away from the Truth. For the date of revelation, see introductory note to chapter 40.

The chapter opens with a declaration of the revelation of the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân from Almighty Allâh, as do all the chapters of this group. The Reminder is not withheld from a people, we are here told, on account of their transgressions, because revelation comes to man as a favour from the Merciful Allâh. The second section is devoted to a condemnation of the various sorts of polytheism. The third begins with a mention of Ibrâhîm, the father of many a chosen one of Allâh, and after referring to the Prophet's rejection, answers the objection as to why an influential man or a man of wealth was not chosen to convey the Divine message. It is in this connection that we are told that it is not the possession of gold and silver that makes a man great in the sight of Allâh. The fourth follows, stating that the Qur'ân will make the nation rise to real greatness, and, therefore, those who, being misled by evil companions, deny it, will regret their deeds. The fifth shows how a powerful ruler like Pharaoh was destroyed, when he refused to listen to the Truth which was revealed to Mûsâ. The mention of Mûsâ is followed by a reference to 'Îsâ in the sixth section, as the polytheists of Arabia justified their idolatry by the Christian doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus, which is here rejected. The last section contrasts the fate of the two parties, the believers and the disbelievers.

SECTION 1: **Revelation is a Divine Favour**

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 *Ha Mîm*

2 By the Book that makes manifest!

- 3 Surely We have made it an Arabic Qur'ân that you may understand.
- 4 And it is in the Original of the Book with Us, truly elevated, full of wisdom.^a
- 5 Shall We then turn away the Reminder from you altogether because you are a prodigal people?^a
- 6 And how many a prophet did We send among the ancients!
- 7 And no prophet came to them but they mocked him.
- 8 Then We destroyed those stronger than these in prowess, and the example of the ancients has gone before.^a
- 9 And if thou ask them, Who created the heavens and the earth? they would say: The Mighty, the Knowing One, has created them,

4a. *Umm al-Kitab* literally signifies *mother* or *original of the Book*, and the opening chapter of the Qur'ân is also known by this name, because, in its essence, it contains the whole of the Qur'ân. But here it signifies the original source — the knowledge of Allâh — from which the Qur'ân comes, and the meaning is that the Qur'ân cannot be destroyed because it exists in Divine Knowledge. The words, in fact, contain a prophecy, uttered at a time when the Prophet was alone and helpless, that the Qur'ân will be exalted in the world, for that is its position in Divine Knowledge. Another explanation of the words is that they refer to the clear prophecies of the advent of the Holy Prophet as stated in the Bible, e.g., Deuteronomy 18:15–18.

5a. *Dhikr* may be translated here as meaning either the *reminder* or *eminence*. The meaning in the first case is that Allâh would not refrain from admonishing a people who have become extravagant, and in the second case that He intends to raise a people to eminence who are so extravagant that there is no hope for their regeneration.

8a. We shall destroy them, we are here told, as stronger opponents of truth were destroyed before them.

- 10 Who made the earth a resting-place for you, and made in it ways for you that you might go aright.
- 11 And Who sends down water from the cloud according to a measure, then We raise to life thereby a dead land; even so will you be brought forth.^a
- 12 And Who created pairs of all things, and made for you ships and cattle on which you ride,

13 That you may sit firm on their backs, then remember the favour of your Lord, when you are firmly seated thereon, and say: Glory be to Him Who made this subservient to us and we were not able to do it,

14 And surely to our Lord we must return.

15 And they assign to Him a part of His servants.^a Man, to be sure, is clearly ungrateful.

SECTION 2: Polytheism condemned

16 Or has He taken daughters to Himself of what He creates and chosen you to have sons?^a

11a. Attention is called here to the laws prevailing in the physical world to impress the need of similar laws in the spiritual world. As rain descending from heaven quickens a dead earth, so Divine revelation would regenerate or raise to life people who, sunk in ignorance and superstitions, were spiritually, morally, and intellectually a dead people.

15a. The reference here is to the Christian doctrine of assigning a son to God, and in the next verse to the idolatrous doctrine of ascribing daughters to God.

16a. This subject is also dealt with in 16:57, 58, and 37:149 –153. In the latter place there is clear mention of their calling the angels daughters of God: “Or did We create the angels females, while they witnessed” (37:150). Similar words occur further on in verse 19. The next verse shows how untrue they were to themselves, as they ascribed daughters to God but disliked daughters for themselves.

17 And when one of them is given news of that of which he sets up a likeness for the Beneficent, his face becomes black and he is full of rage.

18 Is one decked with ornaments and unable to make plain speech in disputes (a partner with Allâh)?^a

19 And they make the *malâ'ikah*, who are the servants of the Beneficent, females.^a Did they witness their creation? Their evidence will be recorded and they will be questioned.

20 And they say: If the Beneficent had pleased, we should not have worshipped them. They have no knowledge of this; they only lie.

21 Or have We given them a Book before it so that they hold fast to it?

22 Nay, they say: We found our fathers on a course, and surely we are guided by their footsteps.

23 And thus, We sent not before thee a warner in a town, but its wealthy ones said: Surely we found our fathers following a religion, and we follow their footsteps.

24 (The warner) said: And even if I bring to you a better guide than that which you found your fathers following? They said: We surely disbelieve in that with which you are sent.

18a. The reference in this verse is to the idols which were bedecked with ornaments. The inability of the idols to speak is adduced by Abraham as an argument against their divinity (21:63), and the same inability of the idols to answer the prayers of their devotees is advanced as an argument against the divinity of the golden calf (20:89). It should be borne in mind that the two doctrines, taking the angels as daughters of God and worship of female divinities, were in some way connected with each other in the Arab mind. This is not only clear from what is stated here and in 37:149 –153 but also from another early revelation. After mentioning the three female idols *Lat*, *'Uzzâ* and *Manât*, and denouncing their worship (53:19 –23), the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân goes on to speak of the doctrine of the angels being taken as daughters of God (53:27), thus showing the close relation in which the two doctrines stood.

19a. See 4:117a where it is shown that every Arab tribe had its own female divinity.

25 So We exacted retribution from them, then see what was the end of the rejectors!

SECTION 3: Allâh's Choice of a Prophet

26 And when Ibrâhîm said to his sire and his people: I am clear of what you worship,

27 Save Him Who created me, for surely He will guide me.

28 And he made it a word to continue in his posterity that they might return.^a

29 Nay! I let these and their fathers enjoy till there came to them the Truth and a Messenger making manifest.

30 And when the Truth came to them they said: This is enchantment, and surely we are disbelievers in it.

31 And they say: Why was not this Qur'ân revealed to a man of importance in the two towns?^a

32 Do they apportion the mercy of your *Rabb*? We portion out among them their livelihood in the life of this world, and We exalt some of them above others in rank, that some of them may take others in service. And the mercy of your *Rabb* is better than that which they amass.^a

28a. This shows that the Arabs possessed enduring traditions that their great ancestor Abraham was a preacher of Unity.

31a. The two towns referred to are Makkah and Tâ'if. They would not follow any but an important man of the world, a man possessing much wealth or high rank. Moral greatness possessed no value in their eyes.

33 And were it not that all people would become one (disbelieving) community, We would provide for those who disbelieve in the Beneficent, roofs of silver for their houses and stairs (of silver) by which they ascend,^a

34 And (of silver) the doors of their houses and the couches on which they recline,

35 And of gold. And all this is naught but a provision of this world's life; and the Hereafter is with your *Rabb* only for the dutiful.

SECTION 4: **Opposition to Truth is punished**

36 And whoever turns himself away from the remembrance of the Beneficent, We appoint for him a *shaitân*, so he is his associate.^a

37 And surely they hinder them from the (right) path, and they think that they are guided aright.

38 Until when he comes to Us, he says: O would that between me and thee there were the distance of the East and the West!^a so evil is the associate!

32a. Human society is based on differences in rank. It is only through this difference that society can be organized and developed into a State, whether it be socialistic Russia or capitalist England and America. From these differences in the external conditions of men, the conclusion is drawn that differences must exist in the devotional sphere too, and some people are chosen to guide others. Allâh's choice for prophethood does not, however, depend on wealth, but on internal worth.

33a. Gold and silver have no worth or value in the sight of Allâh, and He would grant these things to disbelievers to any extent they desire, were it not that most people would be misled by these worldly temptations. The verse undoubtedly draws a picture of the modern condition of the world, where man's whole energy is devoted to the acquisition of wealth and more wealth and material gains and more material gains, and he is shutting his eyes altogether to the moral values of life, with the result that the world today stands on the brink of an abyss of utter destruction.

36a. As verse 37 shows, the devil here is the evil companion who leads man to evil.

39 And as you did wrong, it will profit you naught this day that you are sharers in the chastisement.

40 Canst thou then make the deaf to hear or guide the blind and him who is in clear error?

41 So if We take thee away, still We shall exact retribution from them,

42 Or We shall show thee that which We promise them^a— surely We are Possessors of power over them.

43 So hold fast to that which has been revealed to you; surely you are on the right path.

44 And surely it is a reminder for you and your people, and you will be questioned.

45 And ask those of Our messengers whom We sent before you: Did We ever appoint deities to be worshipped besides the Beneficent?

SECTION 5: Pharaoh's Opposition to Mûsâ

46 And truly We sent Mûsâ with Our messages to Pharaoh and his chiefs, so he said: I am the messenger of the *Rabb* of the worlds.

38a. The word which I translate *the East and the West* is *mashriqain*, which would literally signify *the two Easts*. But the dual number in such cases often denotes the thing mentioned with its opposite. Thus *mashriqain* means *the place of sunrise* and *the place of sunset* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

42a. Verse 41 describes the general law of the punishment of the wicked; even if the Prophet dies, the wicked will meet their doom. But that the general statement should

not give rise to any misconception, we are immediately told that the Prophet would see the discomfiture of his enemies with his own eyes.

47 But when he brought them Our signs, lo! They laughed at them.

48 And We showed them not a sign but it was greater than its fellow,^a and We seized them with chastisement that they might turn.

49 And they said: O enchanter, call on your *Rabb* for us, as He has made the covenant with you; we shall surely follow guidance.^a

50 But when We removed from them the chastisement, lo! They broke the pledge.

51 And Pharaoh proclaimed amongst his people, saying: O my people, is not the kingdom of Egypt mine and these rivers flowing beneath me? Do you not see?

52 Rather I am better than this (fellow) who is contemptible, and can hardly express himself clearly.

53 Why, then, have bracelets of gold not been bestowed on him,^a or *malâ'ikah* come along with him in procession?^b

54 So he incited his people to levity and they obeyed him. Surely they were a transgressing people.

48a. The meaning is that great signs were shown, each sign being greater than the one which preceded it. Just as the word *akh* means *brother* or *an associate* or *a like*, or *a fellow*, its fem. *ukht* means *sister*, or *a like* or *a fellow* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). According to *Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain al-Râghib al-Isfahânî, *ukht* here means *the sign that preceded it*.

49a. See Exodus chapter 8, from which it appears that every time a sign was shown Pharaoh entreated Mûsâ to pray for the removal of the punishment, promising that he would not in that case oppose him.

53a. Pharaoh's suggestion is that, if Mûsâ were the messenger of an Almighty Allâh, he should have been a king, bracelets of gold signifying abundance of wealth. It is shown here that Pharaoh's objection to Mûsâ was similar to the objection of the Quraish to the Holy Prophet.

53b. That is, Mûsâ should have come with *malâ'ikah*, as a king comes with his armies.

55 Then when they displeased Us, We exacted retribution from them, so We drowned them all together.

56 And We made them a thing past and an example for later generations.

SECTION 6: ‘Îsâ as Prophet

57 And when the son of Maryam is mentioned as an example, lo! Your people raise a clamour thereat.^a

58 And they say: Are our deities better, or is he? They set it forth to you only by way of disputation. Nay, they are a contentious people.

59 He was naught but a servant on whom We bestowed favour and We made him an example for the Children of Isrâ’îl;^a

60 And if We pleased, We could make among you *malâ’ikah* to be (Our) vicegerents in the land.

61 And this (revelation) is surely knowledge of the Hour,^a so have no doubt about it and follow me. This is the right path.

57a. The Qur’ân in many places condemns the doctrine of attributing children to the Almighty. Such a condemnation is contained in this very chapter in the section preceding the last. But when the case of ‘Îsâ was cited, the disbelievers objected to the respect shown to him, while their own idols were condemned. This is the significance of the words occurring in the next verse: Are our deities better, or is he? Why should not the same honour be shown to their national gods as was shown to the god of another nation; for was not “Jesus” accepted as God by the Christians?

59a. This verse contains the answer to the objection referred to in verse 57. ‘Îsâ was not honoured because the Christians took him for God or Son of God, which was in fact their own error, but because he was a righteous servant of Allâh on whom He had bestowed favours. Not only was ‘Îsâ the recipient of Divine favours, but he was also *an example of virtue* for the Isrâ’îlites to whom he was sent as a prophet, a model whom they could imitate in righteousness. On the other hand, the idols whom the Arabs took for gods were mere stones and could do no good to their worshippers. Moreover, the idol-worshippers represented even their great men as sunk in immorality. As an instance, take the Puranas of the Hindus, where even such Hindu gods as Shiva are represented as deeply sunk in immorality.

61a. The *Hour* signifies here the departure of prophethood from the house of Isrâ'îl. Such is the clear significance of the parable of the vineyard in Matthew 21:33, Mark 12:1, and Luke 20:9, which ends with these remarkable words: "Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. 21:43). Prophethood had long remained in the house of Isrâ'îl, and, as history shows, Jesus was the last prophet of the Mosaic dispensation. The Qur'ân is here called the knowledge of the Hour in the sense that its revelation was a clear indication that prophethood was now being taken away from the house of Isrâ'îl and given to another people, as Jesus himself had said. Some take the personal pronoun *hû* as referring to Jesus, but even then the meaning would be that Jesus was sent to give people the knowledge that he was the last prophet of the Israelite dispensation.

62 And let not the devil hinder you; surely he is your open enemy.

63 And when 'Îsâ came with clear arguments, he said: I have come to you indeed with wisdom, and to make clear to you some of that about which you differ. So keep your duty to Allâh and obey me.

64 Surely Allâh is my *Rabb* and your *Rabb*, so serve Him. This is the right path.

65 But parties among them differed, so woe to those who did wrong for the chastisement of a painful day!

66 Wait they for aught but the Hour,^a that it should come on them all of a sudden, while they perceive not?

67 Friends on that day will be foes one to another, except those who keep their duty.

SECTION 7: The two Parties

68 O My servants, there is no fear for you this day, nor will you grieve —

69 Those who believed in Our messages and submitted (to Us),

66a. The *Hour* here signifies the doom of the Quraish.

70 Enter the Garden, you and your wives,^a being made happy.

71 Sent round to them are golden bowls and drinking-cups, and therein is that which (their) *nafs* yearn for and the eyes delight in, and therein you will abide.

72 And this is the Garden, which you are made to inherit on account of what you did.
73 For you therein is abundant fruit to eat thereof.
74 Surely the guilty will abide in the chastisement of hell.
75 It is not abated for them and they will therein despair.
76 And We wronged them not but they were themselves the wrongdoers.
77 And they cry: O Mâlik^a let your *Rabb* make an end of us. He will say: You shall stay (here).
78 Certainly We bring the Truth to you, but most of you are averse to the Truth.
79 Or have they settled an affair? But it is We Who settle (affairs).^a
80 Or do they think that We hear not their secrets and their private counsels? Aye, and Our messengers with them write down.^a

70a. It is with their wives that the faithful are told to enter paradise. In spite of such clear statements in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, it is alleged that Islâm denies a *nafs* to woman!

77a. *Malik* means literally *master*. Here it signifies the forces of Allâh which implements His Commands appointed over those in hell.

79a. The disbelievers are told that they should not think that they have settled the affair of the Holy Prophet by their plans to kill him, for it is Allâh Who really settles all affairs.

80a. The words contain a clear reference to the secret plans against the Holy Prophet.

81 Say: The Beneficent has no son; so I am the foremost of those who serve (Allâh).^a

82 Glory to the *Rabb* of the *samâwât* and the earth, the *Rabb* of the Throne of Power, from what they describe!

83 So let them talk and sport until they meet their day which they are promised.

84 And He it is Who is Deity in the *samâwât* and Deity in the earth. And He is the Wise, the Knowing.

85 And blessed is He Whose is the kingdom of the heavens and the earth and all between them; and with Him is the knowledge of the Hour, and to Him you will be returned.

86 And those whom they call upon besides Him control not intercession, but he who bears witness to the Truth and they know (him).^a

87 And if thou wert to ask them who created them, they would say: Allâh. How are they then turned back?

81a. *In* means *if*, but it is also used to indicate *negation* (“no son” here), carrying the same significance as *ma*. In this sense it is often followed by *illâ*, as in 4:159, 58:2 and 67:20, but is sometimes used in that sense without being followed by *illâ*, as in 10:68, 21:111 and 72:25. That it here means *ma* or *not* is corroborated by 19:88–93: “And they say: The Beneficent has taken to Himself a son ... and it is not worthy of the Beneficent that He should take to Himself a son. There is none in the heavens and the earth but comes to the Beneficent as a servant”. See 19:92a, where it is shown that the word *Rahmân* negatives the very idea on which the doctrine of sonship is based. Even if *in* is taken as meaning *if*, the words do not mean that, if God had a son, the Prophet would be the foremost of those who serve that son. The significance in this case would be that, when a man serves Allâh, he may metaphorically be called a son of God, and therefore the Holy Prophet, being the foremost of those who serve, would be a son in that sense, but he refused to be called a son of God because the use of such metaphorical words had given rise to grievous errors.

86a. The bearer of witness to the Truth is no other than the Holy Prophet, and they knew well that he was the most truthful of men.

88 And his cry — O my *Rabb*, these are a people who believe not!^a

89 So turn away from them and say, Peace! They will soon come to know.^a

88a. After years of hard work among them and after being subjected to every kind of persecution, and, lastly, finding them planning against his very life, the Holy Prophet still prays to Allâh not to inflict punishment upon his opponents. He, however, unburdens his mind in the cry: “O my *Rabb*, these are a people who believe not”. An unparalleled example of heroic fortitude under trials and loving sympathy for fellow-human beings!

89a. The turning away from them and saying: “Peace!” are clear prophecies of the Flight. It should be noted that early Makkan revelation contains undeniable prophecies of all the important later events in the life of the Holy Prophet. The fact that a particular event is mentioned in a certain revelation does not settle the date of that revelation, for the Holy Book is full of prophetic statements.